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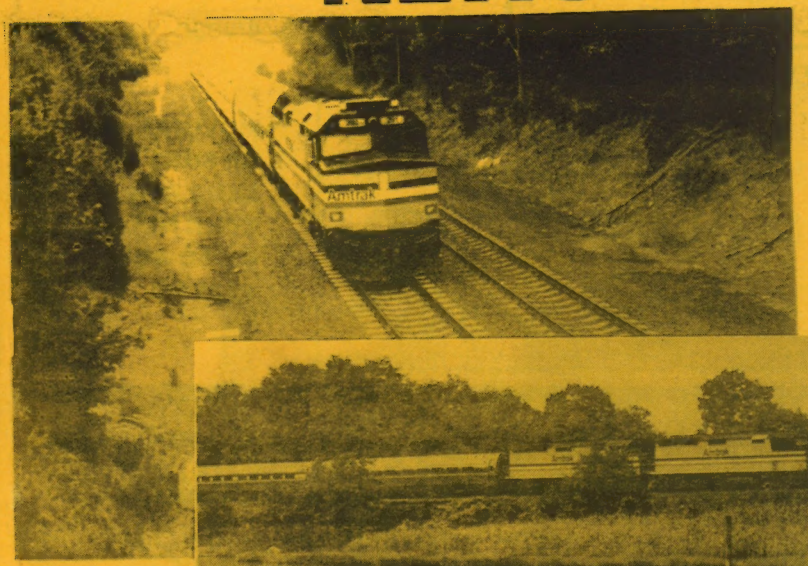

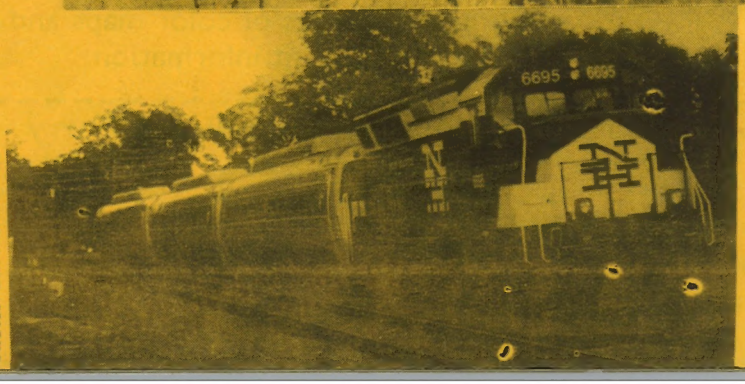

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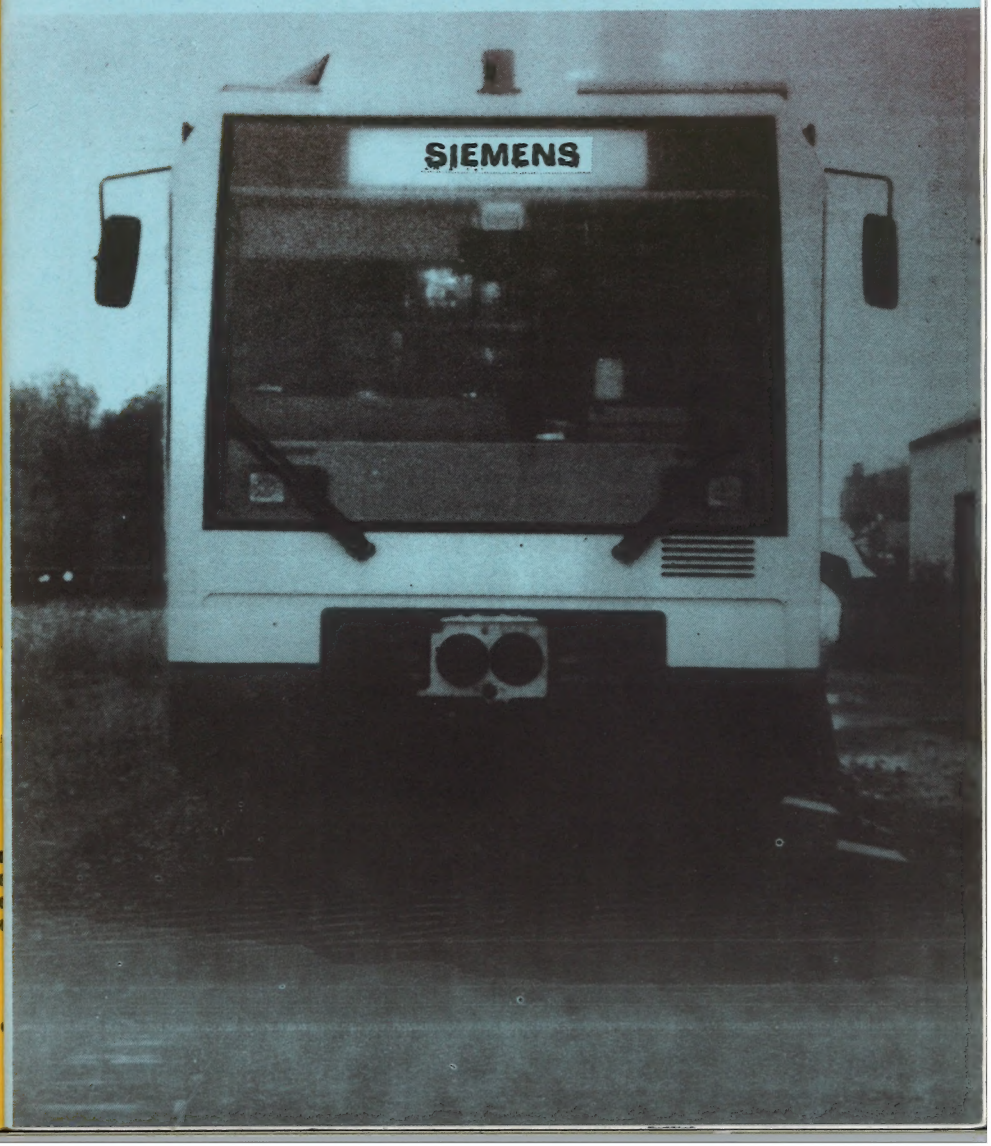

ON THE COVER

The USA tour of Siemens' RegioSprinter self-propelled passenger rail car began in Northern California in December. Here the vehicle is seen at Cotati CA on December 9 in a photo by Gene Poon. In this issue Mr. Poon describes the RegioSprinter's first visit to the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

Our major feature article this issue is a fascinating report by Frank G. Williams on a cross-country Am-trip that included the **Sunset.**

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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS (ISSN 0896—4440) is published semimonthly (twice a month) by Message Media, 1611 #2-A San Pablo Ave, Berkeley CA 94702. **(DO NOT SEND MAIL TO THIS ADDRESS, WHICH IS GIVEN ONLY TO FULFILL POSTAL REQUIREMENTS.)** Periodicals Class postage paid at Berkeley CA (USPS 006—012).

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

Vol. 26, no. 1. Whole no. 560. January 7, 1997. Copyright © 1996 by Message Media. Address all mail to Message Media, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Subscription rate $26 per year to US & possessions. To other countries $35 per year. Single copy $1.25.

STAFF: James Russell, Editor. Editors-at-Large: Glenn Lee & Paul Rayton. Regional Correspondents: Peter Bretz, Jack Ferry, Adron Hall, Kenneth Maylath, Peter Roehm. RTN ADVERTISING RATES: Express Ads $1.50/line of 80 spaces. Display ads $1.50/square inch.

Happy New Year and happy rail riding from the staff of RTN!

EAST COAST REPORT

Metroliner #114 at Morris Tower PA on Nov 25. Gene Poon photo.

The SEPTA board voted Dec 19 to officially hire John K. Leary, recruited from St. Louis' transit system, as its new general manager, replacing Louis Gambaccini. Leary headed the Bi-State Development Agency, operator of St. Louis' bus system and its highly-praised MetroLink light rail line connecting East St. Louis and the region's Lambert Airport. Opening MetroLink in July 1993 was Leary's primary accomplishment. Before going to St. Louis, Leary had worked at the MBTA in Boston.

Leary will become general manager of SEPTA in February, at which time Gambaccini will retire.

The SEPTA board also approved a $475,000 study of a far-reaching light rail line that could run from central Philadelphia to Reading PA, some 60 miles northwest.

The rail line, called the Schuylkill Valley Metro, would begin on a trolley loop in downtown Philadelphia, pick up an abandoned Conrail spur running below street level, then run through a tunnel under the Philadelphia Museum of Art. After passing the Philadelphia Zoo, the line would follow today's little-used R6 Cynwyd line, past the current end of track and over an unused bridge across the Schuylkill River, and continue through Manayunk, Conshohocken and Norristown. West of Norristown, the line would serve King of Prussia, Phoenixville and Pottstown before reaching Reading.

Reading's transit agency, Berks Area-Reading Transportation Authority, is joining SEPTA in this study. No one has any idea of the line's cost, but it is certain to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The study will take more than a year.

The last Philadelphia-Reading passenger service, operated by Conrail for SEPTA and PennDOT, ceased in Aug 1981 as a Norristown-Pottstown shuttle with connections to Philadelphia. Service to Reading and on to Pottsville in Schuylkill County, 93 miles from Philadelphia, had ended in June of that year. SEPTA pleaded excessive costs and diesel equipment's inability to mesh with electric MU operation through the then-abuilding Center City Commuter Tunnel as reasons to drop Philadelphia-Reading-Pottsville semi-intercity service, and a similar operation to Quakertown and Bethlehem. PennDOT was also curtailing its aid to the passenger service, required since part of it ran outside SEPTA's five-county jurisdiction. The trains consisted of Budd RDCs, and until the late 1970s, a push-pull set of heavyweight, semi-streamlined coaches with a diesel unit at each end.

Attempts to reintroduce service west of Norristown met with SEPTA's lack of commitment to long-term planning and funding, and resistance by Conrail to allow its Phila-

delphia-Reading-Harrisburg route to be used for passenger service.

The Schuylkill Valley Metro is SEPTA's second idea for a long-distance modern trolley route. SEPTA finished a study for the Cross-County Metro, which would follow a Conrail, ex-PRR line from Trenton and Bucks County through King of Prussia to western Chester County. This line, 48 miles long, would not enter Philadelphia but would be a cross-suburban link. A detailed "investment study" is due this summer. The line, if built, would cost about $350 million.

SEPTA board chairman Thomas M. Hayward said that SEPTA was not committed to either rail project and may have to choose between building one or the other.

●●●

Another part of SEPTA's service cut package was enacted Dec 15, with cuts in a number of suburban bus routes. Two feeder bus lines linking Regional Rail with suburban shopping and office park areas were dropped due to low ridership and a lack of local funding. Another bus route linking Norristown with county and state prisons in Graterford and Eagleville was cut from Mon-through-Sat to Sat only. Part of a bus line linking Plymouth Meeting with King of Prussia, via the Gulph Mills Norristown High Speed Line stop, was dropped between Gulph Mills and King of Prussia. Riders to King of Prussia must now change buses at Gulph Mills. —James Thornton.

Diesel-Powered Light Rail Chosen As Preferred Mode for South Jersey

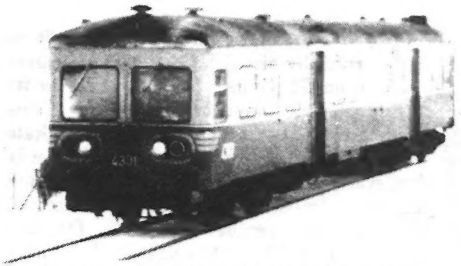
By Bruce J. Russell

At its Nov 15 meeting the NJ Transit board of directors approved a $1.2 billion light rail plan for south Jersey, allowing it to escape criticism for devoting nearly all its resources to the northern portion of the Garden State.

North of Trenton, many big ticket items such as the Kearny Connection, now in service as Midtown Direct; Secaucus Transfer; and the restoration of commuter service on the Susquehanna Railroad are on the verge of completion. Much new rolling stock has been delivered, and the Hudson Bergen Light Rail Line is assured. But in the southern zone of the state, the nation's most densely populated, all that's presently running is the Atlantic City Line from Philadelphia to the resort.

NJ Transit intends to cobble together a 56-mile route using the existing Conrail-owned Camden & Amboy secondary track from Trenton 36 miles south to Camden. Here the line will be joined with another conrail route running west towards Glassboro, about 20 miles. Both lines are presently freight only and are part of a group the big carrier is trying to sell to a local shortline operator. The former was once a Pennsylvania RR property and had passenger service until 1963. The other was a Pennsylvania Reading Seashore Lines route and had two round trips per day using RDCs from Camden as far as Millville NJ, east of Glassboro. Service was eliminated for the usual reasons of lack of patronage, absence of subsidy dollars, and the desire of the companies to get out of the business of hauling passengers. While freight traffic remains, it's not an enormous amount, and the prospects for increases are minimal since New Jersey is no longer an industrial state.

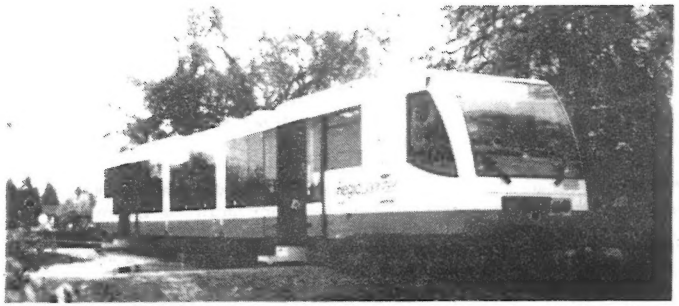
NJ Transit has proposed taking these two underutilized lines now running through an area with high population, although it is in an urban-sprawl pattern, and using them



The diesel LRT planned for South Jersey may use vehicles similar to this Dutch car. However, boarding will be by low-level platforms. Photo by Peter Velthoen 1987

as a right of way for a light rail operation. However, it will not be one identical to San Jose, Sacramento, Dallas, Calgary, etc., in which most of the trackage is double and where a lightweight European catenary is used for power distribution. Instead, the system will feature single track with passing sidings and *no electrification*. The rolling stock will consist of lightweight, European-style, low-floor vehicles propelled by compact diesel engines. The RegioSprinter, train being marketed by Siemens (see p.10) is one of the options being examined. It can run as a single car or in a train of up to four units. It is reported to be extremely fuel-efficient and economical.

The line would originate at the Trenton station on the NE Corridor, where connections can be made for NY or Philadelphia.



The Siemens Regio-Sprinter, shown here in a photo by Gene Poon, also is being considered for the proposed light rail service.

The single track would then proceed directly south, running parallel to the Delaware River over rails once used by the NY-Atlantic City train Nellie Bly, which ceased operation in 1961, leaving a doodlebug run that came off in 1963. Stations would be low-platform and very simple—more or less bus-type shelters. In Camden it would interface with the Patco High Speed route to Philadelphia and Lindenwold. From Camden it would proceed east through Gloucester City before terminating in Glassboro. The Camden to Glass-boro tracks were from 1906 until 1950 electrified with third rail for use by the PRSL commuter service from Millville. At one time this operation extended to Atlantic City but was cut back in 1931. Automobile and bus competition killed it.

NJ Transit has had a terrible time with NIMBYs in South Jersey who have waged a battle against any rail service resumption. Many apparently feel comfortable with existing highway gridlock and pollution. No wonder the agency has completely given up on the Burlington County corridor, which would have seen passenger service to Mt. Holly. What's now under consideration involves Mercer, Camden and Gloucester Counties only.

This reporter has mixed feelings about the so-called diesel LRT being proposed for the tri-county area of Southern NJ. For the price of $1.2 billion there ought to be full electrification plus double track and possibly high-level platforms. What NJ Transit is suggesting should come in at a far lower figure. Other cities have been able to complete heavy-rail metros for this type of capital. One has to wonder whether inordinate amounts of money will go to favored contractors. After all, *existing* rights of way will be used, and there will be no elaborate grade separations, no catenary, no substations, etc. The 27-mile Hudson Bergen LRT in the northern part of the state is going to cost over $1 billion, but it will be double track and completely electrified, with service every 10mins. The South Jersey operation envisions half-hourly headways.

Whether this initial plan becomes reality or is modified remains to be seen. Nevertheless, there is now a plan which can be further studied and evaluated. Diesel technology has its good points, but in the opinion of this writer it is best suited for very low density lines.

However, a start must be made. Single track can eventually be converted to double iron, and catenary put in place at any time.

●●●

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority spokesman Michael Murray told the Boston Globe (reported Dec 22) that the long-awaited Portland ME to Boston passenger service could begin by late fall 1997, making four daily round trips, each one of about 2:20 length. The information came out of a meeting in Wells ME on Dec 18. Attending the meeting also were reps of Train Riders Northeast, a 1200-member advocacy group who spearheaded the move to bring back rail passenger service. The group's chairman, Wayne Davis, told the paper that the meeting was a "mob scene" and that his group was delighted with the news.

Stops in New Hampshire would be at Dover and Exeter, and on weekends also in Durham. Haverhill MA would be a stop, and in Maine additional stations would be Saco and Wells. In the summer, stops at Old Orchard Beach ME would be included.

Locations of New Hampshire stations are at Third & Chestnut in Dover; at Lincoln St at the old train station in Exeter; and at the old train station by the Dairy Bar in Durham.

Murray told the paper that the major obstacle now is disagreement between Amtrak and the B&M/Springfield Terminal Railway over terms of legal liability.

Ethan Allen Express had its inaugural run Dec 2. The New York (Penn Station) to Rutland VT train, with one daily round trip, is supported, as is the **Vermonter**, by the state of Vermont. For its scheduled 9:07pm arrival in Rutland on opening day, officials and residents were on hand to see 25 people alight. Dec 3 was the first southbound run, and 34 passengers had been confirmed for that trip. Dec 6 saw 50 riding the train north of Albany, with 41 going all the way to Rutland. By Dec 13 the ridership was up to 45. Amtrak said it was satisfied with the early ridership figures, and said that they should increase as the ski season moves into full swing. The Rutland station is downtown, adjacent to a multi-story parking garage, with a bus terminal about 400 feet away. Killington, a local ski resort, provides a shuttle bus. This is the first regular passenger train in Rutland since 1953.

Amtrak has a fall/winter timetable out for the Vermont Services. It numbers the northbd train 291, or 293 on Sat; southbd, 294, 290 Sat & 292 Sun. Weekdays 291 lvs NY at 3:50pm, and on Sun 293 lvs at 5:40pm. Southbd, 294 lvs Rutland at 1:20pm for a 6:42 NY arrival. Departure time Sat is 7:05am and Sun 2:55pm. Intermediate stops are Fort Edward-Glen Falls NY, Saratoga Springs NY, Schenectady, and the usual Empire Service stops from Albany on.

Sunday River Express Ski Train will again operate this season, under the auspices of the Belfast & Moosehead Lake RR, using its Swedish passenger equipment (although the train runs, as before, on the St. Lawrence & Atlantic. Trains run Fri, Sat & Sun Dec 26-Apr 6. There is daily service Dec 26-Jan 5 and Feb 15-23. There is also service on Jan 20 and Mar 17. —Loring Lawrence.

The Potomac & Rappahannock Transportation Commission in early Dec approved spending $23 million for 13 bi-level commuter cars for Virginia Railway Express. The VRE had wanted 20 cars, but two counties in Nov voted to limit the purchase to 13.

The Poughkeepsie Journal on Dec 16 editorialized in support of extending Metro-North Harlem line to Wassaic, in the town of Amenia NY. And it endorsed the plan to put two stations in Wassaic, rather than one.

RAIL CANADA

BC Rail will operate its successful group tour train, the **Whistler Explorer**, Mon-Fri from May 26 to Sep 26, 1997. It's available as a day trip from Whistler and is popular with tour groups going one-way to or from the Cariboo.

The **Cariboo Prospector**, BCR's year-round scheduled psgr train, runs on a 460-mile route N. Vancouver-Prince George. Daily service (exc Dec 25) runs to Lillooet, and tri-weekly to Prince George.

The **Royal Hudson** steam train and boat/train daytrip will run Wed-Sun plus holiday Mons May 31-Sep 21, but not on Jun 4&5 or Sep 17&18. Two classes of service are offered.

Present plans are for BCR to sell its RDC cars and drop the daily and local service after May 15, 1998. Instead, a 2-day luxury-type cruise train will run every four days N. Vancouver to Prince George. Called the **Westcoast Explorer**, it will use refurbished coaches and bi-level Ultradome cars, with full meal service in "vintage" dining cars. It is scheduled to run Jun 1-Sep 30, 1998. Final schedule to be out Jan 15.

Vancouver BC saw its worst snow storm in 75 years on Dec 29. There was no immediate report on its effect on transportation.

CN's 146-mile Matapedia-Chandler rail line was transferred to Chemin de Fer Baie des Chaleurs, a Quebec Railway corp. subsidiary, on Dec 1. According to VIA, their train still runs to Gaspé. However, it is unclear who owns the Chandler-Gaspé line or for how long it will run. —Julien R. Wolfe.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

In a column by Michael Kesterton in the Dec 19 Toronto Globe & Mail entitled "Social studies: A Daily Miscellany of Information", Kesterton lists quotable quotes under the headings of the seven deadly sins. Under Sloth: "When Al Gore received a letter from Joe and Dolores Delgado of Dallas, decrying rail cuts that would wipe out the Texas Eagle service, the US Vice-President wrote back without doing his homework: 'I share your view that the urgent problem of species extinction and the conservation of biological diversity should be addressed...I look forward to working with you for the future of our planet.' "

—On the other hand, given the actions of the last Congress, maybe the Eagle and Amtrak are indeed endangered species.—Tony Turrittin.

Also from the Toronto Globe & Mail, Dec 20: "People's bottoms are getting wider by an inch every 30 years, reports Airbus Industrie, the European concortium that supplies commercial airplanes to Air Canada and others. 'People don't fit into a 707 seat any longer', says Jonathan Schofield, chairman of Airbus Industrie of North America Inc. in Herndon, VA..."

THE OPEN VESTIBULE

On Dec 3 NARP put out a "news release" (see RTN 559) calling for public support of continued subsidization of Amtrak, and deploring Amtrak management's decision to eliminate four national system long distance rail passenger routes on May 10, 1997.

NARP urged the public to lobby for increased federal subsidy to Amtrak to save these trains, but failed to note that Amtrak already receives ample subsidy to satisfy the exceptionally modest infrastructure needs of the threatened services, or that all four of the threatened routes—like all of Amtrak's popular long distance national routes—fully recover their actual direct costs of operation from farebox revenues and from mail and express business. Indeed, Amtrak's current operating subsidy grant from Congress is two to three times the total subsidy need of the entire national system operation (outside of the costly, high density local corridor/transit services provided by Amtrak in the Northeast).

NARP failed, therefore, to note that the four threatened national system routes could bed preserved and enhanced by Amtrak management without federal or state subsidy increases, authority or direction by the mere expedient of management choosing to invest a tiny portion of the financial resources already available to Amtrak into these routes, all of which are rather heavily used by paying passengers and all of which have for years generated a positive net operating cash flow for Amtrak.

What stands between preservation of these trains and May 10, 1997 therefore is not a lack of federal and state financial support but a simple management decision. Management of Amtrak, including a majority of its politically appointed board of directors and its CEO, is comprised largely of Northeastern transit and political interests. These interests have simply decided on a purely parochial, self-interested and political basis to appropriate the vast majority of available federal subsidy to the use and benefit of a single, densely populated region of the country representing just 2% of Amtrak's route system.

NARP's repeated demand that Congress provide a dedicated and off-budget, hence unaccountable, permanent funding source for Amtrak's insatiable need for subsidies for this one region of the country is all but unreconcilable with NARP's lamentation of management's decision to kill the four national routes in the absence of meaningful assurances that the dedicated funding would be invested in the higher return national routes rather than the bottomless pit of the Northeastern routes. NARP is to be commended for its late and limited recognition that it is inequitable and bad policy to expect state and local subsidies to sustain single daily (or even less than daily) train service in national system markets, while vast federal resources support highly redundant local trains with no state subsidy contribution in the Northeast.

URPA believes that Amtrak can function effectively and efficiently only by its continued development of a fully integrated nationwide network of interconnecting train services, supplemented by higher frequency local corridors where local market demand both justifies the service and can support it financially through fares and state or local subsidy. Recognition and acknowledgment of the enormous financial burden of the NE Corridor (where Amtrak currently consumes about $1 billion of public capital from all sources annually) does not speak to the social utility of providing higher density train services in those essentially local markets. But it does suggest that Amtrak could and should reexamine the cost-effectiveness of the services it offers in those markets from a strictly financial and business perspective, rather than an essentially political outlook, as has been the case for two decades, when the price of its failure to do so is to jeopardize four successful national system routes which constitute the only rail passenger service available to large sections of our country.

Studies conducted by URPA, the Surface Passenger Transportation Institute, Dr. Ronald Sheck and others have repeatedly demonstrated that a modest expansion of Amtrak's network of interconnected national system longer-distance, hence multi-market routes into a true national matrix route structure, operated in all cases on a basis of no less than daily service, while quarantining for financial accounting purposes the continuing huge capital and operating subsidy needs of the Northeast, would allow the balance of the national system to rise to a self-sustaining level of financial performance over about a 5- to 7-year transition period. This outcome would be driven by simple economies of scale as a gradually increasing volume of services which cover their own direct operating costs from self-generated revenues contributed ever-larger portions of coverage of the infrastructure costs necessary to sustain their operation. Cross-subsidization of operating losses in the Northeast by these positive cash-flow trains in the remainder of the national system would have to be suspended during this transition.

URPA believes that the primary resource necessary to preserve and enhance this nation's national network of intercity passenger trains is not ever larger federal subsidies or a dedicated source of capital funding for the needs largely of the Northeast, but a new management team at Amtrak with the vision to exploit the untapped opportunities that lie before them.

Andrew C. Selden
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

WEST COAST REPORT

Above: BART's Concord yards seen from a Colma-bound train. RTN photo

Metrolink's Saturday holiday schedule planned for the Riverside line for Dec 7 was moved to Dec 14 because UP was doing a double track cut-over at Montebello Dec 7-8, the project a Vail Ave to allow construction of a new Metrolink station.

Metrolink system ridership reached its highest ever on Nov 21: 25,460 for the day, a result partly of rainy weather.

Rapidly growing ridership prompts Metrolink to consider the purchase and rebuilding of its 14 present GO-Transit cars. A final decision depends on an inspection of frame and body condition and funding.

Metrolink proposes to run its 1997 beach trains on 18 weekends from Jun 7 to Oct 18, most on Sat except for Sunday Jul 20 and Aug 31. Fares may rise from $10 to $13.

California High Speed Rail Commission met in L.A. Nov 22 and voted to set the route of the train through Palmdale. While adding 10-20 mins to the running time, this will allow a future leg to Las Vegas, permitting service from both So. and No. California. Palmdale remains a possible site for a new major So. California airport. It was also decided to bring the train into the Ontario airport area, then south to San Diego using the Interstate 15 alignment. Community leaders have lobbied against the coastal route, as they did some years ago for the American Hi-Speed train.

Initial ridership of the Seattle to San Diego through coaches is very impressive, considering that no promotion has been made to the public and little inside Amtrak. One Superliner coach runs Oakland-San Diego and one Seattle-San Diego. These join two other coaches at Los Angeles. Southbd, additional cars are run as necessary for the unreserved portion L.A.-San Diego.

The Amtrak Board has approved the purchase of enough locomotives to replace most, if not all the existing F40s. Testing is ongoing on whether the new GE P42s can handle the frequent-stop local trains or if the F59 model of EMD is better for that. The **Coast Starlight** will get new P42 engines. Funds were also approved for yard improvements in Oakland and Seattle, and more funds for the locomotive facilities at Redondo Jct. It is hoped that in 1998 funds will be available to replace all Amfleet and Horizon coaches on the San Diego-San Luis Obispo runs.

The double-tracking and siding rebuilding project on the Santa Fe between Bakersfield and Fresno is well underway. Some of the double track work is finished north of Fresno. Santa Fe is extending four tracks south of Rana to the old Colton station. Discussions with the UP (SP) are being held for construction of a flyover at Colton, with UP going over the Santa Fe. This could remove a serious freight bottleneck with increasing traffic. —Ed Von Nordeck.

Meeting in S.F. Dec 13, the Calif. High Speed Rail Commission approved plans for the high-speed rail line between Sacramento and San Diego.

BART found that the Dec 12 system breakdown was caused by a failed transbay tube electrical cable improperly installed when the system was built.

The last day for staffing of the Glendale station is Jan 5, to allow reconstruction. All trains will continue to stop there, but no paid staff will be on duty. With little notice, San Clemente stop was moved to the Metrolink station.

New York Times in a front-page article Dec 30 entitled "Drawing a Hard Line Against Urban Sprawl" said that the Portland OR MAX light rail system was "crucial to [the city's] plan to keep jobs and homes within an area that would be ringed by farms and forests". The plan was successful, the paper said, "forc[ing] jobs, homes and stores into a relatively compact area, served by light rail, buses and cars". Other cities, including Seattle, are now trying to follow Portland's lead, the Times said. The front page included a photo of a MAX light rail train climbing eastbound onto the Steel Bridge. On the Times' Web page, the picture was in color.

Amtrak West began Nov 10 running a dedicated bus connection from Salinas to Monterey and Carmel CA for **Coast Starlight** customers. It runs directly to area resort hotels and Monterey's transit center. On a reserved basis, it serves the following Monterey stops: Marriott, Hyatt Regency, Holiday Inn, and Carmel's Best Western Inn. Pickup at these hotels is "on demand" and reservations must be made at least an hour before departure. Buses are 15-psgr minivans with wheelchair lift and baggage storage. One-way fares are $8 Salinas to Monterey, or $10 to Carmel.

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The California cars in use in Southern California sometimes experience door problems. A cutout mechanism in the engine prevents the train from moving if any door is open, and the sensors on the doors seem overly sensitive, indicating open even when doors are closed. The engineer can override the mechanism from the engine, but when a train is running in push mode, he cannot because of lack of an override switch in the cab cars. To circumvent this situation, Amtrak has been running the California engines with Amfleet cars and the F40s with California cars.

The Pacific Northwest experienced unusual, extremely foul weather in the week before New Year's, and it was going to continue into early January. Ice, snow, rain and wind combined to virtually shut down transportation, among many problems. On Dec 27 the northbound Coast Starlight was turned at Seattle, and eight buses brought Seattle passengers to the train at Portland. Trains between Seattle and Portland were running up to 3-4 hours late when they ran. Somehow the buses were able to get through.

A Boeing-Vertol streetcar in San Francisco, disabled and out of service, was being towed up a steep incline on the J-Church line the morning of Dec 29 by a two-unit streetcar. The coupler of the towed car failed and the car rolled downhill, knocking over a utility pole and striking six autos. The car operator and two people outside suffered minor injuries, and the Boeing was totalled. Officials said that if it had been a weekday, many school children in that area would have been hit.

The Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Board, which will take over responsibility for the **Capitol** trains from Caltrans, will hold public forums this spring for input on how the San Jose-Sacramento rail service should be operated. Train Riders Association of California urged its members and other rail advocates to provide their input. TRAC said it will press to maintain full Sacramento to San Jose service: "Sacramento is by far the biggest contributor of passengers on the line. Early BART proposals of terminating or turning trains mid-route ignored reality. TRAC believes the Capitol Corridor's main market is all-day intercity travel, rather than home-to-work daily commuters. 'We're talking college students, seniors, people on personal business, and some business travelers', said TRAC Administration Director Michael Cline."

TRAC also said that the CCJPB must commit to extending service to Reno NV, and pointed out that detailed Caltrans studies showed that the overall financial performance of the **Capitols** would improve with an extension of service to Lake Tahoe and Reno. TRAC also called for "pin-point marketing plans" rather than "ambiguous state-wide campaigns".

TRAC said that CCJPB's administrative affairs are currently being handled by BART staff under supervision of its general manager, Tom Margro. He will lead negotiations with the state, and is the best person for **Capitol** supporters to direct correspondence to. His address is: Tom Margro, Executive Director, CCJPB, PO Box 12688, Oakland CA 94604. To send letters to the CCJPB staff, address them to: Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Board, at the same box as above.

The final conclusions of an engineering study indicate that a rail passenger project connecting Monterey CA with the San Francisco Bay Area is feasible and within the funds available to Monterey County, according to an early Dec report. Rebuilding the Monterey Branch Line of SP could be done within the $17 million allocation of rail

bond funds, the report said. Besides physical improvement of the line, trackage rights and station costs plus operating funds for train and bus service need to be funded. The consultants—DeLeuw, Cather—will also recommend that the Salinas River Bridge be replaced rather than repaired. Ridership for the Monterey-Bay Area service was projected to be higher than for Salinas-San Jose. A station as close as possible to Monterey's Fisherman's Wharf was preferred, as day use visitors would be especially sensitive to that feature. The City of Monterey began public hearings on location of the train station, the first meeting being Dec 14. Three sites are being considered. Two are within walking distance of Fisherman's Wharf, on the east and west sides of Figueroa St, while the third is opposite Park Ave, further away.

Consultants examined two types of service—weekend excursion service and weekday commuter service between Salinas and San Jose. Also, weekday service from Monterey was examined. The weekend service yields the best economic projections. Travel time to San Francisco is estimated at 3 hrs, 10 mins, and the fare would be $12-20 one way. Next summer may see a test train in operation. It would terminate at first in Seaside, with upgrading of the remaining mile into Monterey to follow. Seaside plans a station and transit center at Canyon Del Rey and Del Monte boulevards, costing $1 million and including a restaurant.

The RegioSprinter train is scheduled to visit Fort Ord and Marina on the Monterey Branch Line Jan 3,4 & 5. Tickets were to be sold for 9am-5pm service.

Salinas is planning to improve its Amtrak station, and has applied for a $1 million state Transit Capital Improvement grant to help acquire the land and complete building of roads, bus access and platform/passenger improvements.

Siemens RegioSprinter Visits the Wine Country

By Gene Poon—photos by the author

It looks like a streetcar. You can board it without a raised platform. It can run on light, secondary rail lines and needs only a single operator. And it visited Northern California in December to strut its stuff for rail enthusiasts, transit officials and the public.

The RegioSprinter, built by Siemens of Germany, is touted as a "new generation of passenger railcar" from the makers of the record-setting ICE train. In service in Europe since 1995, and in scheduled revenue service in Calgary earlier this year, the RegioSprinter is visiting California first before continuing on a national tour, sponsored by Siemens and Amtrak.

Restricted from operating on heavy mainline railroads, the RegioSprinter's tour will take place on lightly-traveled lines of major railroads, and on short lines and commuter routes. My first glimpse of this unusual rail car was in Healdsburg, CA. on Dec 9, on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

Spotted at the loading area for NWP's public excursions, the RegioSprinter was accompanied by an entourage from Siemens and Amtrak West. From the scheduled 9:00am opening, this public display attracted many local residents who came to the tracks to get a glimpse of Siemens' idea of local rail transit. Although some were puzzled by the uneven, "split-level" interior, the manufacturer's rep quickly pointed out that ,although the two cab ends are elevated to accommodate the twin diesel engines and transmissions below the floor, the center section is purposely built low to allow boarding from ground level. Indeed, even the wooden steps provided at each display site would be unnecessary in regular service, as the RegioSprinter features retractable ramps for passenger loading, even for wheelchairs.

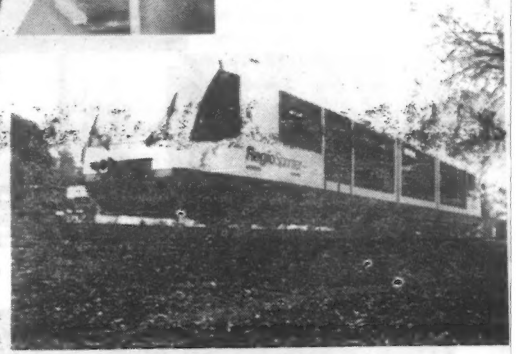
Selected RegioSprinter Specifications

Typical Operating Speeds	10-60 mph
Maximum Weight	approx. 50 tons
Height Above Top of Rail	11.3 feet
Width	approx. 10 feet
Maximum no. of Passengers	74 seated; 100 standees
Engine	5-cylinder turbo-charger and intercooled diesel engines with a rating of 270 hp at 200 rpm
Braking System	highly reliable triple braking system ensures peak vehicle performance in all seasonal conditions

SIEMENS

Left: The RegioSprinter has a comfortable but utilitarian interior.

Below: The RegioSprinter poses at Healdsburg CA on Dec 9.



Configured with 74 seats, the RegioSprinter retains many European features, including a self-serve farebox which could have sold tickets to Aachen, if one had brought a few pfennigs, and door signs in German. Nevertheless, American visitors knew what the RegioSprinter was meant for, and waited in anticipation of a train ride.

The visit to Healdsburg had been scheduled for display only, but Northwestern Pacific CEO Ed McLaughlin, noting that he had an Amtrak engineer to operate the train, an NWP engineer to serve as pilot, and a qualified conductor, decided to take the RegioSprinter for an unscheduled ride.

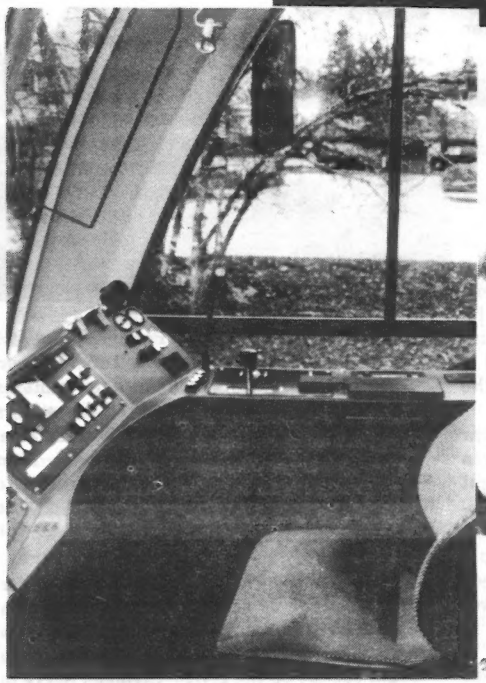
At the 30-mph speed limit, the car rides well. The track in the Healdsburg area was once approved for 45-mph freight operation, and it felt as though the RegioSprinter could have run comfortably at this speed, if not at its top speed of 62mph. Safety, however, prevented any higher speed tests, as grade crossing signals set for lower speeds would not allow them. Indeed, in places, our engineer had to slow sharply to allow crossing gates to fully lower--which only served to demonstrate the powerful braking of this rail car.

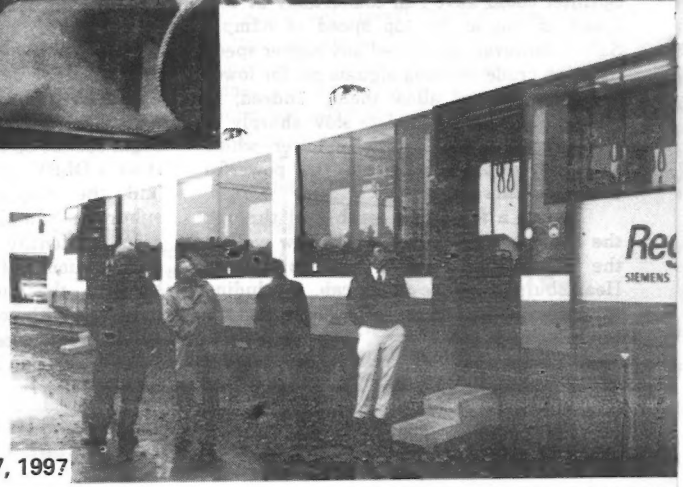
After a few miles southward through the Sonoma wine country, our crew walked the length of the car to take us back to Healdsburg from the other cab, concluding this unexpected treat for visitors to the RegioSprinter.

Later in the day, after public displays at Windsor and Santa Rosa, scheduled public excursions departed from Cotati and made round trips past Penngrove, a 4½ mile one-way distance. Each time, upon returning to Cotati, it took but a few minutes to gather up a load of delighted passengers who had come in the rain for a train ride. Smiles were in evidence everywhere, from the faces of children on their first ride, to spectators beaming at the sight of the RegioSprinter and waving happily at the little train.

When all was done, the RegioSprinter impressed me as a streetcar, but one which would need only minimal track upgrades and no investment in overhead catenary. to begin service on the NWP. Siemens refers to it as a DLRV, or Diesel Light Rail Vehicle, and the displays scheduled for Napa, suburban San Jose, and Monterey would seem to identify the target market for this $1.6 million rail car. Even on the NWP, however, the question of safety in mixing light rail with conventional railroad freight traffic would need to be addressed. But, then, hasn't San Diego been doing just that, for years now?

View from the rear cab as the RegioSprinter passes through yard trackage at Healdsburg, right. Below that, RTN subscriber Ed Graham studies the Russian River from his seat on the vehicle. Large windows provide good viewing, and car has a roomy feel. Below, the enngineer's seat and controls, photographed at Healdsburg. All photos on Dec 9.





Right: the vehicle needs only a step-box to board passengers at Cotati CA, as Amtrak officials prepare to greet the public.

From the *Sunset* Into the Eastern Storm

By Frank G. Williams

High marks to the California Cars and Viewliner sleepers, but low marks for Amtrak's continued poor timekeeping. Plus a Nor'easter and other weather problems made for a very interesting rail vacation indeed.

October—my very favorite time of the year, the time when my annual rail venture rolls around. At last I would be able to check out the new California cars and Viewliner sleepers.

The northbound Los Angeles-Reno "Pooch" (Greyhound) was right on time from my little town of Independence CA, midway on the route. As I would soon find out, on-time arrivals and departures would not be the norm for this trip!

As Amtrak had done away with their 8am Thruway bus from Reno to Sacramento, I decided to change dogs in Reno so I could arrive in Sacramento by mid-morning. Greyhound information told me I could get an express bus from Reno to Sacramento. Unfortunately, they forgot to inform me that it did not run on the day I wished to travel, so I was forced to ride a local. If you think Amtrak has padded schedules, you should have been on this cur. The last four stops were 15mins long—*each!* I was never so glad to see a trip end in my whole life!

I lay over for one night at the Holiday Inn, Capitol Plaza—a short walk from and to the kennel (Greyhound station) and the Amtrak station. I was up bright and early for a delicious breakfast before check-out to avoid the microwaved Am-breakfasts. I don't mind a "nuked" lunch, but I want that first meal cooked to order.

Oct 15: My birthday. (I refuse to say which one.) A good crowd had gathered for the arrival of **Capitol** train 723, which arrived from Roseville only a few minutes down. At last—a ride on the much-delayed California Cars! For the most part, I was quite impressed, especially with the tables in coaches, some of which had AC outlets allowing me to play my portable CD player on Amtrak-generated power. Haydn and Beethoven made excellent traveling companions on #723 and #714, both Cal-car equipped.

Arrival in Emeryville was on time and the wait for **San Joaquin** train 714 was a very pleasant one in the spotlessly clean depot. No. 714 arrived also a few minutes down, but as with #723 soon made up time.

While #723 carried a former **Santa Fe El Capitan** Hi-level car for a lounge, 714 had a Cal-car lounge, a very nice car indeed! A spicy Italian sandwich and a split bottle of California Burgundy made a most enjoyable lunch. My overall impression of the California Cars was a good one. My only complaint is that the seats in the coaches hardly recline.

Arrival in Bakersfield was on time for that agonizing ride on a packed Thruway bus to L.A. When, oh when are we going to get that long-talked about rail extension to L.A. over the former SP **San Joaquin Daylight** route? It can't be too soon for me!

Minutes seemed like hours as we plodded along those misnamed "freeways" into L.A. As much as I have grown to despite the city of my birth, I need to go there once in a while just to remind myself just how much I don't miss living and working there!

I had not been on the **Sunset Limited** train 2 since it was extended to Florida, so I decided to ride all the way to Jacksonville. And between the Thruway and train 2 I had more than enough time to check out the new Red Line extension.

After a hearty dinner of my boyhood favorite, Egg Foo Yung, at nearby Chinatown, I made my way back to Union Station for what I thought would be an on-time (10:15pm) departure of #2/22. There is no way this train could be late, as they had all day to get the trainset ready, or so I thought. But I reasoned without taking current Amtrak "thinking" into consideration! The train did not depart until almost 11:30! And what was Amtrak's excuse for the delay? A

cruise ship company, Xpo-America of Aliso Viejo CA, had chartered a few private cars for a journey to New Orleans. Why should that delay things? The group was not sprung upon them at the last minute, was it?

The tour group—whose tour manager is Mr. Chuck Walker, a former Amtrak executive—chartered, among others, an extra diner which they used as a club car/lounge, and which they kindly opened to all sleeping car passengers. What a very nice addition, and one that is needed all the time—especially on the **Sunset**, given the time it takes to get from end point to end point.

I joined the happy throng for a "Champagne Sendoff." The club lounge was decorated as if it were New Year's Eve, with all sorts of gaudy, yet pleasant decorations and candles. When our cruise ship on rails finally did pull out, shouts of joy and much applause could be heard. (The train never did make up any time, by the way.)

When the party began to wind down, I made my way back to my room Economy bedroom 13 in car 0229. It was spotlessly clean and neat as a pin! I took a quick shower (one of the best things Amtrak ever did was to install those showers for Economy bedroom passengers) and settled down to bed and somehow the poor timekeeping seemed less important. After the not-so-quiet roar of a few passing freights (pure music to my ears), I was out like a light.

I awoke at [illegible]n hour out of Tucson to a beautiful [illegible]na day. I made my way to the diner for an excellent breakfast. I soon noticed that a lot of Union Pacific power was already on the scene. Those bright yellow units were a refreshing change from the usual SP "bloody nose" diesels—many of which had become very dingy over the years.

The menu now being used on the **Sunset** is one of the best I have seen in years. Besides the usual, it included a Mexican and Cajun specialty appropriate to the train's path of travel. Both were very good.

At New Orleans the extra cars were removed, along with the nice people who went with them. I sure missed that club-lounge. Why can't we have something like that all the time?

The next morning (Oct 18), or afternoon, as we were still running late, we arrived in Jacksonville, my first time ever on Florida soil. The skies looked threatening and the humidity was unbearably high—only the beginning of some of the worst weather I have ever seen!

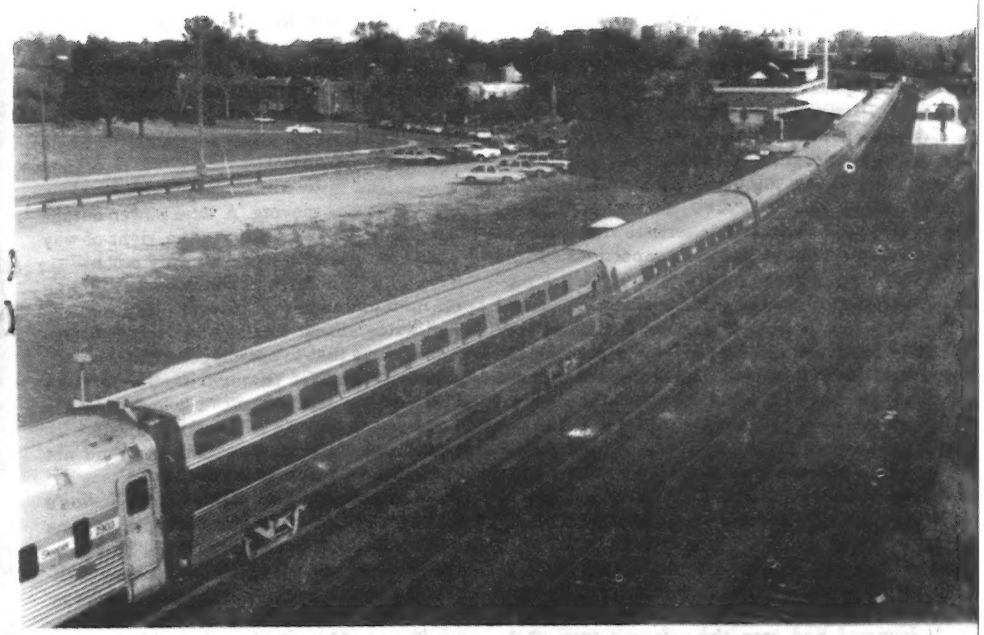
In spite of the late arrival of train 2, I still had time to hop on a local bus to check out the downtown area. What a pity that the train station can't be re-relocated there. The recently renovated waterfront area is quite attractive and I enjoyed strolling through the new mall.

It started to rain as I made my way back to the Clifford Lane station for the arrival of train 98, the **Silver Meteor** and another first for me—a ride on one of the new, and long-delayed Viewliner sleepers. Well, #98 was also delayed (surprise, surprise)!

When it finally did arrive, I was quick to note how the Viewliner stood out from the rest of the train, which was a mix of Heritage and Amfleet cars.

Has this ever happened to you? You look forward to something, as I had looked forward to my first Viewliner ride, only to be disappointed when the awaited event finally occurrs? Such was *not* the case here. The Viewliner not only lived up to my expectations, it surpassed them! What a fine car!

What impressed me most was the climate control. Although the weather was muggy and sticky, inside the car it was near perfection. And the individual controls in the compartments really work as they should—a change from Superliner I's, which are iffy at best. If I could fault anything, it would be the lack of shelf space in the shower. The shelves in Superliner IIs are much wider. But a small matter indeed.



(Above:) A Viewliner sleeper on the **Silver Star**. The car stands out from the other cars—the Heritage sleeper (#2903) to the left and the Amfleet cars to the right. This is the northbound train discharging passengers at Alexandria VA on Nov 10, 1996.

(Below:) The eastbound **Sunset Limited** making one of its last stops at Orlando FL, on Nov 1, 1996. Effective Nov 10 the train no longer operates south of Sanford FL; previously the train ran to and from Miami, an additional 286 miles to the south. The **Sunset** now originates and terminates at the **Auto Train** facility in Sanford. The **Sunset** and the **Auto Train** are the only Superliner trains running in Florida. Photos by Alex Mayes.

That night I slept the sleep of the comatose while outside the weather was bad and getting *worse*! Several CSX signals had been disabled, resulting in slow orders for #98. Arrival in Washington DC was over two hours down. Now that I think back, it's really a wonder that we were not any later!

A few minutes before we pulled into Union Station the crew chief came into the Viewliner to arrange alternate trains due to weather-related missed connections. I did not envy his task, as a few of my fellow passengers were getting rather steamed! I would have been one of them, had I not had well over an hour to make my connection to NortheastDirect train 84 to Boston, due out at 9:05am. So I made my way to the Metropolitan Lounge. The good news was that the train would depart on time. The bad news? They canceled the club car! Thus I had two choices: be downgraded to Custom Class or wait for #174, so I chose the latter.

Train 174 was announced about 20 minutes before departure, which was on time to the second. I was glad to see a full club car in service rather than the half club, half Amlounge I had seen the previous year. Only half of it was opened, but by the time we crossed into New Jersey all of it was in service, and doing rather a brisk business, especially considering the weather.

I really like those club cars. Their rows of single seats are ideal for those traveling alone. The double seats are not unlike those found in the first class sections of airplanes. The food, however, is strictly "coach class." Not bad, but lacking in variety. The breakfast was so blah I don't even remember what I had! For lunch and dinner the entrée was the same—Cajun chicken with red beans and rice. (Fine for people like me who like spicy food, but what about those who do not? Why can't a less aggressive dish be provided for them?) A glass of fine Cabernet was an ideal accompaniment to the above.

Our attendant was friendly enough, but announced to one and all that if anyone wanted anything they would have to let him know. (He usually had his nose buried in a book!) I was always under the impression that club car passengers who paid an extraordinary fare should also receive extraordinary service. That is the way it has always been on every club car I have ever ridden going back to the days of those wonderful "swivel seat" Metroclub models that Amtrak inherited from Penn Central.

The weather outside was bad and getting *worse*! We were on the edge of the latest in a series of hurricanes that had been plaguing the area for weeks. The kind of rain I saw that weekend (Oct 19-20) made the heaviest rain I ever saw in California seem like a mere sprinkle!

The train was slow and getting *slower*—but it *was* moving. A total power outage or a complete washout on the right-of-way would not have surprised me very much!

In New Jersey I saw a house slipping off its foundation and several pickup trucks and autos almost totally underwater! These were things that to me happened only on television news. Yet through it all, the train kept rolling right along. I wondered how many jets could say as much! The rain continued coming down in buckets and did not let up until we were in Rhode Island.

And so we finally limped into Boston's South Station on a wing and a prayer, one might say—late but *safe*! The rain had stopped, but the wind was fierce and bone-chilling. However, much of my ride would be by subway to my motel. I chose the Best Western Terrace Motor Lodge on the B branch of the Green Line (Commonwealth Avenue-Boston College), literally a hop, skip and jump from the Mount Hood stop. (It really pays to plan ahead.)

The MBTA, or simply the T, has unlimited one-, three- and seven-day visitors' passes. I went to the ticket office and purchased a seven-day pass for $18, an excellent bargain. After I scratched off the numbers appropriate to my stay, I went down to the Red Line stop, rode two stops inbound to Park St. (or should that be Pahk?), and walked upstairs where the Green Line stop is located (it is a main transfer point for all four branches of the line, B, C, D and E). In no time at all a B car made the scene and we made it the length of the subway without a hitch—one of the last runs to make it through before the flood!

I showered and went right to bed to rest up for Sunday, the first full day of milking my pass for all it was worth—or so I thought. And then the Nor'easter hit the fan—with a vengeance!

I awakened Sunday the 20th while it was still dark, to pounding rain and howling wind. And it did not let up for the *whole day*! Having no food, I thought I would brave it and run to a nearby coffee shop. When I got there, the foul stench of cigarette smoke made it impossible for me to remain, so I made another mad dash back to my room. When I got back it was as if I had fallen into a swimming pool! I got out of my clothes, hung them up, turned the heater up full blast and waited for them to dry. Even my shorts were soaked! As it turned out, I was stuck in that room the whole day and into the night. I felt as if I had been sentenced there. So I called a Chinese place that delivered and asked them to swim over with a day's supply of Egg Foo Yung. They did, so I didn't starve. However, the Nor'easter didn't really last forever—it only seemed so.

The next morning (the 21st) the wind had stopped and only a light rain was falling. According to the local weather forecast, the worst of it was definitely over, but my worst fears had come true: the Green Line subway was partially closed due to flooding!

I put on the clothes that had been washed by mother nature the day before and made my way to a nearby coin laundry to wash the rest of them.

I observed that the B branch of the Green Line was operating as if things had been normal. But they were running only as far as the tunnel, after which one had to transfer to a shuttle bus for an agonizing ride through heavier-than-normal auto traffic to the Park St station. You never really appreciate rail transit until you lose it—even temporarily! All the other subways (Red, Orange and Blue) were operating their full routes, by the way. I won't elaborate on what torture chambers those shuttles turned out to be, but the whole ghastly ordeal confirmed what I had known since boyhood: the worst rail conveyance is preferable to the best bus!

After pigging out at a superb breakfast buffet at the Parker House (home of the rolls of the same name, as well as the Boston Cream Pie), I set out to do some railfanning. Since all of the Green Line subway was either closed or disrupted, I concentrated on the other three.

The Red Line stop is directly under the Green at Park ("Change at Park Street Under", to quote the title of a most interesting book on the subject). All northbound cars on the Red Line cross the Charles River into the Harvard area.

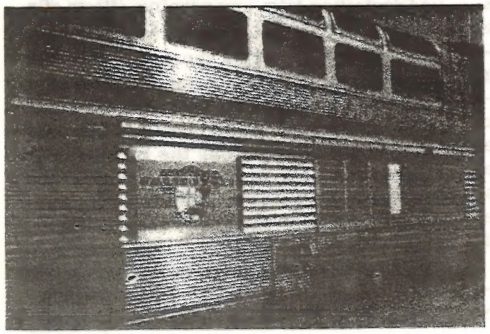
Trolley buses operate from an underground passageway at the Harvard stop. I have never seen buses like these, either electric or self-propelled. They have center doors on the left side in addition to the usual right-hand doors. I wonder if these types operate anywhere else?

After returning on a northbound for a ride all the way to Alewife, I doubled back. The southbound Red Line trains run in two branches. At JFK/U Mass one branch goes to Braintree and the other to Ashmont.

At Ashmont one encounters a most delightful journey into the past—the "Mattapan High Speed", which was unknown to me and largely neglected by railfan publications. Except for the fact that PCCs are used, the line resembles a sleepy little interurban of the forties. The line has only six intermediate stops, so a round trip doesn't take very long. I took two of them! The aging PCCs are getting tired, but they still look futuristic, even in the dawn of the 21st Century! I thought of the five remaining Los Angeles Railway lines (later LATL, later MTA): J, P, R, S and V, discontinued on Mar 31, 1963.

(continued on page 22)

Train of the Year



Pacific Parlor Car on the **Coast Starlight**. RTN photo.

RTN's annual Train of the Year award for 1996 goes to the **Coast Starlight**. This is the second time, and the second year in a row, that the **Starlight** is thus recognized.

Last year we named this train because of its innovations for better customer service, and we expressed the hope that "similar innovations from Amtrak's Intercity SBU" on other trains would be forthcoming. Alas, the past year has seen Amtrak largely devoting its intercity efforts to pruning down the system to the point that it would be weakened and ultimately fail altogether. In an unprecedented press release NARP warned also of

these problems (see last issue).

Meanwhile, the reports on the **Starlight** become more glowing, and our personal experience of the train was very impressive. All American passenger trains should be this good. RTN will not rest until they are.

This is RTN's 21st annual Train of the Year award.

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

Amtrak's calendar for 1997, shown above, features a watercolor painting of the Jack London Square station in Oakland CA by noted artist Ted Rose. Amtrak prices the calendar at $5 each, two for $9, three for $12, including shipping and handling. Send check or money order payable to Amtrak Calendar, PO Box 7717, Itasca IL 60143 and allow two weeks for delivery.

The calendar picture includes two Superliner trains, with identifiable equipment being sleeping car 32080 on the left and P42 engine #5 on the right. If the trains in the painting are to represent real trains on a real Amtrak schedule, the one on the left must be the southbound **Coast Starlight** and that on the right the departing **California Zephyr**, train 6. While the former arrives Oakland at 9:20am, the latter leaves there at 9am. Only a small schedule disparity could easily put the two there simultaneously. However, the shadows in the painting indicate an afternoon sun—the view is looking east—so both trains would have to be badly off schedule.

Amtrak said that calendars from 1980-1986, 1988-1991, 1993, 1995 and 1996 are still available at $2 each in quantities of 1-5, $1.50 in quantities of 6-25, and $1 each for 26-50.

An anonymous but informed source told RTN that "Throughout the UP/SP merger proceedings the constant theme of proponents was that adequate rail competition would remain and that users of rail service west of the Mississippi would see no significant decrease in service alternatives or increase in costs. Safeguards in the form of trackage rights and commitment to compete by BNSF and to a lesser degree Texas Mexican plus a 5-year oversight by the Surface Transportation Board would assure the public's protection from any negative effects of a Western rail market duopoly. Now less than six months after merger approval by the STB the UP has announced dramatic increases in the prices charged for providing excursion train services. Will BNSF and TM offer competitive alternatives, will the STB be concerned, or is excursion train service just the first rail market segment to see the negative service and price effects predicted by opponents of the UP/SP merger?"

Correspondent Bob Rynerson reports: "I dropped by Denver Union Terminal on Mon, Dec 23 to see how trains were doing in the storms and related rail problems that are bracketing sunny Denver. Train 25, the **Pioneer**, departed at 12:27 after experiencing various technical difficulties. They didn't get to those difficulties until after train 5 left at 10:59, having been delayed by, among other things, an elderly woman who needed medical attention. It was concluded that she could proceed, after a visit to the train by the Denver Fire Department crew.

"Amtrak ran a Superliner sleeper Chicago-Denver as car 0533. It was to return to Chicago in train 6 that night. During the holiday season they have done that daily, and sometimes have had a coach in the same cycle. That is distinct from train 6 of Sunday night, which departed mid-afternoon on Monday. It was delayed by an SP derailment at Weso NV. Sunday night's train 26 ran through to Chicago just a bit behind the normal schedule. Holiday travel is strong enough that they had some passengers sold Monday morning on riding Sunday night's No. 6." ●●●

Amtrak, preparing for Christmas season travel, issued the following release: "Amtrak, the travel mode as classic as Christmas itself, is ready to carry more than one million riders home for the holidays. To accommodate the demand, America's passenger railroad is adding extra trains, as well as coaches and sleepers to existing trains.

"Reservations for long distance trains are up 10% over last Christmas, and ridership could increase further if snow blankets more of the country.

"On the NE Corridor...Amtrak will add 12 extra trains and 242 extra coaches between Dec 20 and Jan 5. On the Empire Corridor...Amtrak will add 10 extra trains and 72 extra coaches during the same period. Amtrak's NY-Phila-Harrisburg Keystone and Clocker services will run on normal schedules, except for Christmas Day and New Year's Day when they will operate on a Sunday schedule. Metroliner Service will run on a normal schedule Dec 23 &24, then operate on a reduced schedule Dec 25-27 & Dec 30-Jan 1 because of reduced business travel during the holidays.

"Elsewhere, Amtrak will add extra coaches and sleepers to long-distance trains including the Southwest Chief, Capitol Ltd, Auto Train, City of New Orleans, Texas Eagle, Empire Builder, California Zephyr and Desert Wind. These trains require advanced reservations...

"Amtrak offers a variety of services and accommodations: reserved and unreserved coach seating, Custom Class (an enhanced coach service), first-class Club Service, sleeping cars and the nation's only Auto Train, which carries passengers and their automobiles, mini-vans or motorcycles.

"Special discounts and fare packages make train travel especially appealing for families:

"Half Price for Half Pints: children between the ages 2-15 receive a 50% discount off the lowest available coach fare when accompanied by an adult. (Up to two children at half-fare per adult). Children under two travel free.

"Senior and Disability Discounts: Amtrak offers a 15% discount off the lowest available coach fare to passengers 62 and older and persons with disabilities. The discount is not available on some trains.

"Amtrak is offering additional promotions on selected trains. For example in the NEC on Amtrak's Vermonter, and Ethan Allen Express children ages 15 and under travel free when accompanied by a paying adult and if they board or depart in Vermont. This offer is valid for up to two children with each adult.

"Amtrak has this advice for holiday travelers: Avoid the rush: Choose a travel time other than immediately before and after Dec 25th. Buy roundtrip tickets in advance. Purchase reserved seats where available. Arrive early: at least 30 minutes before scheduled departure. Ticket lines can be long. Use checked baggage service: available at major stations. Two pieces of carry-on luggage is [sic] permitted per customer. For specific schedule and fare information and/or reservations contact Amtrak at 1-800-USA-RAIL or any travel agent." ●●●

Amtrak has signed a lease with Gunderson Inc of Portland OR, a manufacturer of railroad cars and marine barges, for 250 second-hand boxcars to be used in mail service and express service. They are ex-SP and ex-Cotton Belt 50-ft and 60-ft models, both standard and plug-door variety. New trucks are being fabricated by Northern Castings (location unknown). The cars will not have head-end power trainlines, so they can operate only on the rear ends of trains. They will have a bracket to hold a battery-powered marker light. Supposedly the first two cars are (in late Dec) en route to AAR tests at Pueblo CO. —Bill Farmer.

Federal RR Administration in late Dec issued its final rule that requires railroad operators to design comprehensive safety programs to protect workers from being hit by a train or on-track equipment while working on or near railroad tracks. The rule represents a collaborative effort among railroad labor, management and the FRA, who worked in partnership on a Roadway Worker Safety Advisory committee, to develop a consensus-based solution to the hazards faced by railroad trackside workers. Each railroad must develop and adopt an on-track safety program and a safety manual. In the most

recent well-publicized track worker accident, an Amtrak employee was killed by a Metroliner when he was working on the Secaucus Transfer project in late November.

A joint venture including the Kansas City Southern and a Mexican steamship line on Dec 6 won a 50-year concession to take over Mexico's most important rail line, from Laredo TX and Matamoris to Monterrey, Mexico City and Veracruz, reported NARP. They had bid $1.4 billion. The UP, which feeds the most traffic to the line, was once expected to win the concession, but it came in third.

The fifth anniversary of the ISTEA law, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 was Dec 18, reported NARP: "It gave states and regions more choices about how to spend highway trust fund dollars and increase the power of regional planning organizations versus state highway departments. Progress from our point of view has been uneven, but ISTEA was crucial to realizing much of the progress we've seen We want to correct ISTEA's one great flaw, by making intercity passenger rail projects an eligible use of ISTEA funds. The highway lobby in some states are fighting to go the other way, to turn the clock back in favor of a "HOTEA", highways-only transportation bill.

"On [Dec 18] the Surface Transportation Policy Project had a reception at [Washington] Union Station to mark the anniversary. Speakers included the author of the bill: Sen. Patrick Moynihan of NY; Transportation Secretary Peña; Federal Highway Administrator Slater; Amtrak President Downs; STTP's Hank Ditmar; Rep. James Oberstar of MN and Tom Petri of WI, both of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee; and MD Transportation Secretary David Winstead. Moynihan said that in ISTEA he tried to advance the concept of highway rationing and pricing to eliminate the crazy notion that highways are free goods. He said he'd proposed something like this early in the Kennedy Administration. He fears ISTEA may be too late, and said 'I think we've destroyed most of the cities that can be destroyed'."

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This winter and spring are the times for rail travelers to see the Sierra in a magnificent heavy snow layer via the **California Zephyr**. Winter thus far has precipitation well above normal. On Sun, Dec 22 the Sierra received up to 10 feet (!) of snow in places. On that date the westbound **Zephyr** suffered a minor derailment at the summit, apparently due to the weather. Here's the complicated story:

Train 5 that left Chicago Dec 20 was delayed two hours getting past a derailment clean-up scene from an SP freight in E. Nevada. There had been an hour's delay at Salt Lake City when passengers were loaded onto buses, when it was believed the track would be blocked by the derailment. But they were re-loaded onto the train and it continued on. At Colfax in the Sierra, when highway traffic was mired in the blizzard, the CZ derailed one truck of one of the three rear coaches. Amtrak left two of the coaches behind there and loaded their passengers into forward cars and continued on after a long delay. The train reached Sacramento at 4:30am the next day, and although a **Capitol** train was on the next track, due to leave at 5:15, CZ riders were placed on buses for the remainder of their trips, including on one bus to Bakersfield because it missed the **San Joaquin** connection at Martinez. The reason for annulling the train at Sacramento was probably that the crew had worked overtime and needed rest. This was an example of Amtrak subjecting its customers to the maximum discomfort in favor of its own convenience. The CZ's equipment deadheaded then to Oakland, arriving at 7am. It was cleaned and turned quickly to leave as train 6 at 11:30am, 2 ½ hrs late. An unusual move was that three California coaches from the **Capitols/San Joaquin** pool were added to #6 all the way to Chicago. At Colfax the train picked up the two stranded Superliner coaches, but they probably were not opened to passengers because of being cold. The California cars were due back in Oakland Dec 29.

Besides unavoidable delays like the above, and aside from the Amtrak grapevine that says that Amtrak, BNSF and UP top brass want delays on the CZ route reduced, the delays seem to continue. An example was train 35, the **Desert Wind** that left Chicago Dec 19. Its equipment should have been positioned on the service track south of Chicago Union Station by 7am, but at 11am the equipment had not been spotted for maintenance and cleaning. Amtrak sources say this was because numerous car knockers simply did not report for work.

The equipment had not been connected to a head-end power source, so some cars had begun to freeze up. To make matters worse, the Super-liner diner was not stocked—again, because commissary workers did not report to work in the chilly weather. As a result, the train left Chicago 3 ½ hrs late, about 6:45pm. This equipment included cars for the **Pioneer**, train 25, originating at Denver. The **Pioneer**'s dining car was removed from the train at Omaha, perhaps because normal maintenance checks and repairs were not made in Chicago during the turnaround due to shortage of help. The Omaha delay was another two hours, making #35 nearly 6hrs late.

Interestingly, the passengers were quite mellow, train crew said, with few complaints. The train was due at Glenwood Springs at 3:15 pm Dec 20. Depot personnel there first told passengers it would be in at 8-8:30, based on SP dispatcher information. Later, a 9:50 time was posted in the depot, where the agent had made coffee available from her own coffee maker. The train arrived at 10pm, 7hrs late to the minute, and left at 10:15 for Salt Lake, Las Vegas and L.A. Most of its scenic "daylight ride through the Rockies" was made after dark.

On Dec 18 train 5, already late due to weather conditions, was delayed another 30mins when a man described as a "drunk with a Heineken beer can" pulled the emergency brake. Crew wanted him arrested in Glenwood Springs, but he managed to elude police.

Despite usual tardiness of the trains at Glenwood Springs, patronage is described as heavy. Amtrak sources said the large boardings there would easily exceed 500 if local Denver to Glenwood promotions were begun. Shortly before Christmas, Glenwood reported the heaviest early snows in over 20 years, which should boost ski traffic.

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The Trinity Express in Dallas began operation Dec 30 (see RTN 559, p.5). DART has obtained 13 RDCs for the service, but there have been problems in readying the cars, so DART has begun with ex-Connecticut DOT SPV units, pulled by an Amtrak F40. Two such cars in a train were observed by Patrick Lenahan on opening day. The westbd train he saw had the F40 pointed eastward.

This holiday season saw the return of one of the best holiday TV commercials, as Publix, a huge Florida-based supermarket chain, ran its holiday homecoming ad that features Amtrak prominently. The ad shows a family traveling by train to Florida while relatives in Florida prepare a holiday feast. The 60-second ad is set to catchy instrumental music that imitates sounds of a moving train. Featured scenes are shots of a Superliner train emerging from a tunnel in a snowy area—probably the Rockies--, a single-level train crossing a long trestle—almost certainly Lake Pontchartrain--, and a mother and daughter looking out the window of a sleeper—apparently a Heritage bedroom. F40 409 is clearly visible in one scene. The ad has run the past several years between Thanksgiving and New Year's and is a great ad for Amtrak. —Jack Turner.

News in this issue is updated thru Jan 1, 1997.
RTN has just begun its 27th year of publication.

This issue contains 28 pages plus 4-page wrapper: pp. 1-12, 12-A, 12-B, 12-C, 12-D and 13-24.

Rodney Slater, current Federal Highway Administrator, was nominated by Pres. Clinton Dec 20 to become DOT Secretary.

Amtrak has changed the names of some sleeping car rooms. Superliner Economy Rooms now become Standard Bedrooms; Viewliner Compartments become Standard Bedrooms; and Special Bedrooms in both these car types become Accessible Bedrooms. The change came Dec 12.

The Channel Tunnel resumed auto shuttle service Dec 10, while passenger and freight service resumed earlier, but not truck shuttles.

San Francisco began revenue service with two of its new Breda streetcars Dec 10. Locals complained they have a high-pitched whine.

Reno Fun Train will run Emeryville to Reno Feb 7, 21, & 28 and Mar 7, 14 & 21. **Reno Snow Train** will run Jan 28, Feb 4, 11, 18, 25 & Mar 4, 11 & 18. Sponsor is Key Holidays. See travel agents for reservations.

Above: Amtrak RoadRailer on train 89 at Richmond VA on Nov 15. Photo by John P. Stith.

RAIL FANTRIPS

Jan 19-26: Carnival Destiny—East. Caribbean Cruise. World's newest, grandest, largest cruise ship. Fly to Miami, cruise San Juan, St. Croix, St. thomas, to Miami, fly to St. Louis. $1499 up. Real American Experiences Inc, 4351 Holly Hills Blvd, St Louis MO 63116. 314-752-3148.

Feb 4-12: Switzerland, a winter wonderland. 1st class rail, daily excursions, same hotel each nite. Fly St Louis-Chicago-Switzerland. Trip incl Zurich, Glacier & Panoramic Exp., St. Gallen, Luzern, BVZ narrow gauge, option: Simplon tunnel. Real Amer. Expers., see address above. $1799up.

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CARS & CONSISTS

***California Zephyr**, train 5, Denver Dec 23: engines 503 (P32) & 835 (P40); cars 1442 MHC, 1242 baggage, Superliner II transition dorm-slpr # unknown, Superliners sleepers 32037 & 32039, diner 38048, lounge 33030, coach (smoking) 31508, coaches 34061 & 34033. Train left at 10:54a/m, then stopped to set out the short-turn slpr 32017, then left at 10:59.

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***Maple Leaf**, train 63, NY Dec 7: engine 703 (P32AC-DM); cars 21273 & 21051 Amcoaches I, 43033 Amcafe, 21214, 21225 & 44234 Amcoaches I.

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Trolley Freight Action: East Troy Electric Railroad's locomotive L9 (built in 1944 in TMER&T's Cold Spring shops) switches freight cars at the Wisconsin Central interchange track in Mukwonago WI on Jan 24, 1995. Photo by Russ Schultz via Don Scott.

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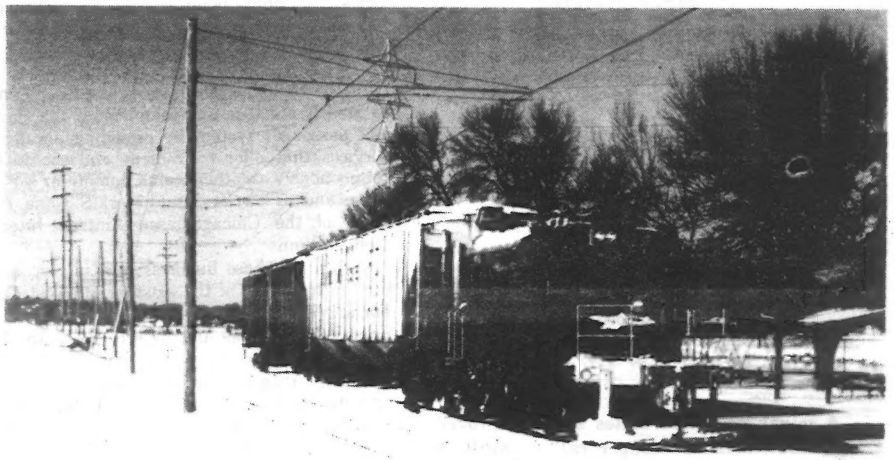

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A spilled box of popcorn,
And parcels in aisles,
The mess was all over,
Even dust from nail files.

He frowned at the slurpers,
And shoes on the seats,
He walks five more steps,
And history repeats.

What he witnessed on-board
Was far from delight.
"Enough is enough!"
He remarked (clearly uptight).

"You've been naughty riders,"
He reluctantly grumbled.
"We promise improvement,"
Together they mumbled.

He bowed his head gently,
And looked at his wrist,
The next stop was Deerfield,
It mustn't be missed.

So he dashed for the vestibule,
As they neared that location.
A sleigh with eight reindeer
Was in sight at the station.

While sprinkling good will,
He announced his goodbuy:
"Merry Christmas to all!"
Then soared into the sky.

Amtrak and nine states study improved Midwestern passenger rail network (a Dec 10 press release from Amtrak Intercity):

Chicago—Amtrak, the US FRA and nine states (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, NE, OH & WI) are working together to consider the creation of an expanded Midwestern passenger rail network.

The Midwest Regional Rail System Study will develop a business plan to provide fast and frequent rail passenger service along current Amtrak routes and additional corridors radiating from Chicago. The proposed system would link the markets of Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Omaha, St. Louis and Toledo under a single marketing identity. Ultimately, the rail passenger network would operate in 200-300-mile corridors where passenger rail has the most potential to be a better alternative to air and auto travel.

The initiative has been endorsed by the Mississippi Valley conference of state transportation agencies and financial support has been pledged by Amtrak, the FRA and the states of IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, NE, OH and WI.

The study will determine the potential competitiveness of medium-distance routes between major city pairs, as well as the efficiencies offered by a multi-state approach. Such a system would preserve, improe and expand rail passenger services within the Midwest because a regional system offers potential cost savings in purchasing, operating and maintaining equipment, better service by coordinating schedules between major city pairs and better asset utilization.

"This proposed network has the potential to greatly enhance and complement the current rail passenger system by providing a range of services that offer convenient and coordinated connections with other trains, commuter services buses and air carriers," said Mark S. Cane, President of the Chicago-based Amtrak Intercity business unit.

Cane, whose business unit is responsible for the operation of the existing Midwest Corridor services, said these enhanced services could prove as popular as Amtrak services on the East and West Coasts.

The FRA has matched the Amtrak pledge of $200,000 for the study. The balance of the estimated $750,000 cost of the study is coming from the nine states.

A team will review service frequencies, passenger amenities, equipment needs and infrastructure improvements. The initiative will also look at opportunities for public/private partnerships to fund and manage the system; a regional marketing approach and identity for the services; the ability of the network to achieve self-sufficiency; and opportunities for conventional as well as high-speed rail. The study is slated to be completed next fall.

Amtrak Intercity operates passenger rail service throughout much of the US, including Midwest corridor trains and most Amtrak long-distance services. Headquartered in Chicago, Amtrak Intercity employs nearly 6000 people in 39 states and is one of three Amtrak strategic business units.

See photos of Canadian Pacific passenger trains in Maine. For over 104 years, Canadian Pacific and VIA operated the Atlantic Limited from Montreal to the east coast across the State of Maine. When it made its last run in 1994, rail passenger service in the State ended. Other articles in the 1996-1997 edition of the Canadian Rail Passenger Yearbook investigate Canadian Pacific's RDC fleet, recount the operation of hospital cars to move wounded troops in two world wars, and explore the history of Canadian Pacific's passenger service and stations in Vancouver. The book is rounded out by a chronology of intercity, commuter and light rail developments in 1994 and 1995. Price $21.95 plus $2.50 postage. Order from Trackside Canada, P. O. Box 1369, Station B, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5R4

AMTRAK RIDERSHIP FIGURES

	SEP 1996	% CHANGE (UNFAV)	OCT 1996	% CHANGE (UNFAV)	NOV 1996	% CHANGE (UNFAV)
INTERCITY SBU						
SILVER STAR	23,339	(21.8)	27,442	8.1	24,990	(10.9)
SILVER METEOR	20,527	(30.4)	26,136	(3.1)	21,386	(26.3)
THREE RIVERS	20,619	29.5	22,907	24.4	12,757	(39.3)
CARDINAL	6,097	(12.8)	7,316	6.9	5,599	(11.8)
CHICAGO-ST.LOUIS	17,897	(8.1)	20,116	(5.9)	21,204	(3.5)
NIAGARAS	25,324	(1.4)	28,979	5.9	29,199	5.0
CHICAGO-PONTIAC	27,502	6.2	28,068	.6	33,283	4.7
ILLINI	6,782	(5.8)	7,471	(11.0)	7,851	(7.0)
ILLINOIS ZEPHYR	5,600	(6.4)	6,617	(6.4)	7,372	(.6)
EMPIRE BUILDER	26,389	.4	25,104	4.1	22,934	(7.3)
CAPITOL LIMITED	14,385	(15.1)	15,155	(16.3)	13,944	(19.3)
CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR	41,733	6.5	39,476	19.2	35,019	4.3
SOUTHWEST CHIEF	20,745	(1.6)	19,297	(1.4)	17,359	(5.0)
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS	13,722	8.8	12,737	7.7	12,141	7.0
TEXAS EAGLE	8,491	17.9	10,237	19.2	8,723	20.9
SUNSET LIMITED	11,877	(2.7)	11,365	(5.9)	9,001	(23.3)
INTERNATIONAL	7,803	(1.3)	7,915	(7.2)	9,188	4.6
LAKE SHORE LIMITED	30,469	4.1	30,304	.3	26,277	(12.3)
SILVER PALM				.0	11,211	100.0
CRESCENT	19,181	3.3	18,948	9.4	18,908	20.5
KANSAS CITY-ST LOUIS	9,317	38.2	14,389	49.0	10,018	15.6
PENNSYLVANIAN	14,788	(9.0)	18,223	(9.5)	14,769	(21.1)
AUTO TRAIN	12,452	(36.0)	15,899	(4.2)	16,026	(12.4)
GULF COAST LIMITED	4,439	100.0	1,358	100.0	8,155	100.0
PERE MARQUETTE	4,117	96.2	5,232	133.9	5,490	15.6
CAROLINIAN	15,517	(55.0)	21,289	.5	19,262	.5
PIEDMONT	4,197	131.5	3,367	50.1	2,165	23.7
SPECIAL TRAINS	732	(34.4)	17,004	76.6	1,479	60.3
TOTAL INTERCITY SBU	414,041	(6.0)	462,351	6.3	427,682	(1.0)
NORTHEAST CORRIDOR SBU						
METROLINERS	169,087	7.0	197,179	11.0	177,679	(1.5)
VERMONTER	5,801	14.4	6,881	15.7	5,864	7.4
NORTHEAST DIRECT	456,502	6.4	490,660	1.9	460,932	(9.4)
CLOCKERS	120,507	(20.6)	137,942	(19.5)	102,027	(32.9)
NYC-PHILADELPHIA-HARRISBURG	36,082	(27.2)	38,936	(20.8)	43,707	(14.8)
EMPIRE	76,650	(3.7)	83,590	6.6	81,343	(1.7)
ADIRONDACK	7,367	(8.8)	8,020	1.8	5,967	(10.0)
SPECIAL TRAINS	6,000	900.0	9,524	17.9	2,700	575.0
TOTAL NORTHEAST CORRIDOR	875,996	(.6)	972,732	(.7)	880,219	(10.9)
WESTERN SBU						
COAST STARLIGHT	37,777	4.6	36,288	11.5	37,196	5.9
SAN DIEGANS	120,862	2.2	113,469	6.3	117,397	(1.3)
PACIFIC NORTHWEST CORRIDOR	26,590	(3.6)	22,320	(5.1)	28,189	18.6
CAPITOLS	32,978	15.9	35,965	22.8	38,965	25.7
SAN JOAQUINS	40,827	(.3)	42,553	8.4	46,254	4.8
SPECIAL TRAINS	2,330	180.7	850	6.3	3,080	100.0
TOTAL WESTERN SBU	261,364	3.6	251,425	8.3	271,081	7.2
SYSTEM TOTAL	1,551,401	(1.3)	1,686,508	2.4	1,578,982	(5.6)

The Amtrak ridership figures for September, October and November 1996 are shown above. The August figures appeared in RTN 555.

Systemwide ridership was down 1.3% in September, up 2.4% in October, and down 5.6% in November. Presumably some of the November loss was due to the Thanksgiving weekend's lapping over into December this year.

Note the continued superior performance of the Western SBU. That section was up 3.6%, 8.3% and 7.2% respectively for the three months. (Comparisons are always with the same month of the previous year.) The Capitols, in particular, are noteworthy for showing double-digit increases each of the three months (15.9%, 22.8% and 25.7%).

***Sunset* to Storm** (continued from page 13)

Ironic, isn't it? The first full day in this century without streetcars in L.A. was April Fool's Day, 1963! Very apropos!

Anyway, back to the present state of Boston transit and the Blue Line. The Red and Orange Lines use third-rail exclusively, while the Green uses overhead power for its entire route(s). The Blue Line is unique in that it uses *both*—third rail in the subway, overhead outside. "Change at Park St Under" explains the reason for this. As the Blue Line operates closest to the ocean, frost is likely to build up on a third rail, causing an irregular source of power. Catenary is far better under such conditions.

By Thursday the 24th the Copley, Arlington and Boylston stations on the Green Line subway had reopened, making the shuttle bus runs less agonizing, but *still* agonizing! The length between the Kenmore and Copley stations is not all that far, but it seems to take so much longer to travel in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

I had another buffet at the Marriot near Copley Square. This once featured their award-winning (and not undeserved) clam chowder, and what a chowder it is too!

By Friday the 25th, the day I left for Chicago via NY, service on the B branch had been totally restored. The C, D and E branches still had not been; naturally that would happen on the day of my departure! There were slow orders between Kenmore and Park but no one was complaining. For slow as the cars were, they were running at the speed of light compared to the shuttles! So for the last time I "changed at Park Street Under" for the two-station run to South Station on the Red Line.

Bidding a rather sad farewell to the T, I made my way up to the waiting room. I had originally booked passage on Northeast-Direct #99, but in the true spirit of déjà vu the club car had been dropped, even as it had been on #84 the previous Saturday! So I had to catch the next train. And guess who was attending the club car on that one? You guessed it—Mr. "Try-to-find-me-if-you-need-anything" who was on #174 last Saturday!

The weather on the Boston-NY run was the exact opposite of what it had been going north. The air was nippy, but the sun was shining brightly. A glass of Cabernet together with the entrée du jour, chicken Dijon with rice and vegetables, is one of the things that makes train travel unique among the various forms of ground transportation. I almost wished it could go on forever!

Arrival at New Haven was *early*. More than enough time to switch from diesel to electric power with time to spare.

Arrival at NY's Penn Station was likewise on time. I found my way to the quiet (by NY standards) Metropolitan Lounge by way of the airport-style waiting area. I had never been able to see the *real* Pennsylvania Station, as my first visit to Gotham happened after the building was torn down to make way for the present monstrosity. One of the real tragedies of the late 20th Century is that in all too many cases we feel the need to "fix" something that is not broken!

I walked across Seventh Avenue to the old Pennsylvania Hotel to have a little libation. After all these years and changes in ownership, they *still* have the phone number made famous by Glenn Miller, Pennsylvania 6-5000.

The first-floor bar, where the "in crowd" gathers, was far too noisy for me, so I descended one level to a much quieter place, ideal for us "squares". One could hear the rumble of the Seventh Avenue subway below but that's not noise, it's "music"! (Okay, I'll admit it—I'm 'way beyond help!)

I had wanted to hop over to Newark for another trip into the past, the Newark Subway, which was profiled in one of last year's editions of RTN. It is so "forty-ish" you almost expect everything to be in black and white. When first I rode it a year ago, I half-way expected to see Nick and Nora Charles standing trackside! As with the Mattapan High Speed, well-maintained PCCs serve the route, which is only about 13mins each way.

As it turned out, I could have gone over there, as #49 was *late*!! This time it was because the diner was malfunctioning. (If I may offer an opinion, Amtrak management is what is malfunctioning!)

Amtrak had all day to check their rolling stock for bad-order cars. Why in the name of Commodore Vanderbilt did they wait until the last minute? Finally at 8:10pm 1 ½ hours down, it appeared. I was furious because I had counted upon seeing the Hudson River, which I could have done if the departure had been on time, as Daylight Savings Time was still on.

After settling down in my Viewliner and partaking of a very good steak dinner, I calmed down. I decided to stay up until Albany and watch the NY and Boston sections combine. The Boston passengers who must wait well over an hour when everything is on time had that waiting time extended to the point that it was over 2 ½ hours before the NY section even pulled in. I knew *exactly* how they felt!

Departure time finally arrived and my shower time did likewise. Then this sleepyhead went right to bed. I marveled at the smooth ride of this fine car. I remembered my last trip in a Heritage sleeper—those tired yet faithful friends—on this very route. I then wondered if the original Superliner sleepers, and those made since, will still be running when they're 50 years old. I tend to doubt it. I did not wonder for long. In less than five minutes I was fast asleep.

The next morning (Oct 26) I decided to brave the diner for breakfast. Last year the **Lake Shore** crew had been one of the worst I had ever seen, and this year was no exception! Our waiter never missed an opportunity to tell one and all just how busy he was! As an example, I did not have a fork. I asked him *five times* for one. He could have brought a handful of them in the time it took him to explain why he couldn't bring one "just now". Needless to say, he did not get a tip for that performance! In spite of everything, the food, when it finally did arrive, was quite good—and *hot*! Due to the lateness of #49, a lunch was served. I had that in my room, thank you!

Finally we made it to railfan Mecca, Chicago—not as late as we probably should have been. While I do not exactly like the backup move into Union Station (it always seems to take more time than necessary), I didn't mind it too much, as the Viewliners (there were two) were on the rear and therefore closest to the station when we finally stopped. I bade farewell to my new-found friends, the Viewliners, and went directly to the Metra ticket office.

I purchased a $5 weekend pass (only 35¢ more than a one-way ticket to Aurora) and an A to H 10-ride ticket for the following week. Sad to say, Metra did away with their weekly pass that allowed so much riding for so little money.

It being Saturday, Union Station was quite naturally not as busy as during the week, but still doing rather well. The checked baggage from #49/449 was delivered to the baggage claim area in record time—more than enough time to catch Burlington Northern (now BNSF) #1313 to Aurora, due out at 3:30pm. And when BN says 3:30 they don't mean 4:00 or 4:30—they mean 3:30 on the dot! Are you listening, Amtrak?

Although a part of the RTA/Metra system, the Chicago to Aurora line continues to be operated by BN. They still employ the crew, who still wear the BN uniform and logo. And although those wonderful old EMD E9s have passed from the scene to be replaced with Metra power, the passenger cars continue to carry the BN name—probably the only regularly-scheduled passenger trains in North America that still carry a company name. (Whether the BN logo will be replaced by the new BNSF logo remains to be seen.) So in this day of subsidized rail agencies from Amtrak down to the state and local level, the BN Chicago to Aurora suburban service remains the closest thing to a privately owned and operated passenger rail service we have left. The Union Pacific (née C&NW) stilll employs their crew, but there are no visible signs on either crewmen or rolling stock. CP/Soo recently surrendered their crew over to Metra on the so-called Milwaukee district, or so I heard.

So, on to Aurora. I took my favorite seat in the left-hand gallery, so happy to be back on my favorite commuter line. But oh, how I miss those E9s!

After we reached Aurora—on time—I checked into my hotel, and what a hotel it is too! It's the "Comfort Suites at the Roundhouse". It just had to have been built with train junkies in mind! It is right next to the BNSF main line and the Aurora Transportation Center. When I made my reservations, I requested a room trackside, and got a dandy. Not only could I hear those numerous freights passing by all night, I could *feel* them. That's my kind of place! Without leaving my room, I could look outside and see the commuter train I was going to take back to Union Station that day. Quite a contrast to previous visits when I had to depend on PACE (the Chicago area suburban bus line) buses to get to outlying area motels. Most PACE routes stop running about 6:30pm weekdays and don't run at all on weekends.

Another nice touch to the hotel: the lobby is delightfully cluttered with railroad artifacts, including a sign that admonishes "Passengers who snore will be put off at the next stop". Look out!

The "Roundhouse" in the name refers to the old CB&Q facility saved from total demolition by former Chicago Bears great Walter Peyton and a group of associates who

converted it into a micro brewery/brew pub.

Anyway, I cannot recommend the notel highly enough. Stay there. You'll be glad you did. The address if 111 N. Broadway, Aurora 60507. Phone 630-896-2800.

The express run into Chicago is, for me, better than the most thrilling ride at a theme park. I like to stand at the front window of the cab car (the locomotive pushes the train on inbound runs). The expresses make only two stops before reaching Union Station –Route 59 and Naperville. After leaving the latter, the train switches over to the center track and heaven help anything that gets in its way! It passes locals and freights as if they were standing still!

The weather was unseasonably cold—the kind they usually don't have until mid-December. And wind? The nickname "Windy City" really fit this trip!

My seven days in my favorite city seemed more like seven hours. I'll not elaborate on my all-too-brief visit, as I did just what I have always done on every other trip I have ever made to Chicago (CTA, other commuter runs, Hancock Tower, etc.), and I never grow tired of doing it!

Friday, Nov 1 came before I knew it. I made my last BN express run into the city, checked my large grip to Reno and my carry-on bags into the Metropolitan Lounge. To kill some time before the departure of #5, the **California Zephyr**, I took a final stroll along upper Michigan Avenue, one of the most beautiful shopping areas known to me. Then, sadly, my final bus ride back to Union Station for another year.

Friday is the only day that the **California Zephyr** runs through to Oakland intact. There are no equipment shuffles at Denver or Salt Lake City, as #25 or #35 do not operate from Chicago on that day.

As the Economy bedrooms had been taken (I reserved last *June*!), I took a Deluxe room. Now I'm spoiled. What a way to travel! It just doesn't get any better!

The CZ was an hour late waiting for a tardy #49 (really?), but made up time and was *early* into Denver!

I did an almost tearful farewell at Reno. After two wind-down nights in that city, the long Greyhound ride back home had me wondering where the time had gone.

To close, a word for Amtrak: *Do something about that abysmal timekeeping!* There is absolutely no reason (except for acts of God) that you can't run what few trains you have *on time!*

You know I'll be back, as I always have come back. (If Southern Pacific couldn't drive me away back in the sixties, nothing can now.) But many first-time riders will *not* be back—as I have heard many of them so state.

A step in the right direction would be to turn the actual operation of the trains back to the private carriers. They know how to run trains on time.

Anyway, something *must* be done. I don't want the trains to simply survive. I want them to *prosper!* And they can prosper—even in today's age. As I said, I'll be back, but many will *not* be back. Think about it!

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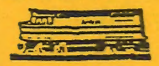

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